



WEDNESDAY COMMUNIQUE

September 5, 2012

Faculty Dimension: The fourth dimension in the Foundations of Excellence is the Faculty Dimension. “Foundations Institutions make the first college year a high priority for the faculty. These institutions are characterized by a culture of faculty responsibility for the first year that is realized through high quality instruction in first-year classes and substantial interaction between faculty and first-year students both inside and outside the classroom. This culture of responsibility is nurtured by chief academic officers, deans, and department chairs and supported by the institutions’ reward systems.”

The dimension rationale is as follows: “At many colleges and universities, there is a less than desirable level of meaningful interaction between first-year students and faculty. Faculty are also less likely to be involved in the design of first-year initiatives than are student affairs professionals and other administrators. And yet faculty connections with first-year students are extremely important in showing students clear pathways to the major and to academic achievement. This Dimension places the responsibility for faculty involvement with first-year students squarely on the institution and its senior officials, not on the faculty themselves. Senior administrators determine the existing system of faculty roles and rewards; they set the standards for what matters most if faculty wants to achieve upward mobility within the profession. While some faculty may choose to interact with first-year students for intrinsic reasons, we believe that it is the responsibility of the institution and its senior leaders to nurture a culture of faculty responsibility for the first year.”

Rankings: In the race for better rankings, we may lose sight of what is important, as happened to a few administrators at Emory University. <http://chronicle.com/blogs/headcount/emory-u-intentionally-misreported-admissions-data-investigation-finds/31215>. A senior administrator at Claremont McKenna College resigned earlier this year after reporting false SAT scores. I have personally advocated using rankings as our window to the world, and hope that as we collect and report our data, we are as careful and honest with ourselves as possible.

TEDxABQ Talk by one of our own: After dealing with his son's difficult medical problems, Professor Vince Clark of our Department of Psychology has begun developing a number of cheaper, safer, and more effective medical technologies for diagnosing and treating mental and brain illness. He will be delivering a TEDxABQ talk (<http://tedxabq.com/>) this Saturday, September 8 at the National Hispanic Cultural Center with free live simulcast locations (Sept. 8, from 10 am to 4:15 pm) at: Flying Star Downtown, 8th & Silver, 723 Silver Ave SW; Bosque School, 4000 Learning Rd NW; Facility, 215 Gold SW Suite 102; and Aux Dog Theater Nob Hill, 3011 Monte Vista Blvd NE.

The Broken Escalator: Sometimes I become accustomed to conducting business in a certain way and miss the simpler and more obvious approach to solving a problem. My kids (and a couple of colleagues) have pointed out to me this YouTube clip that clearly illustrates how habit may limit us:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=47rQkTPWW2I>

Abelard to Apple: The Fate of American Colleges and Universities: is a recent book by Richard A. DeMillo, an ex-CTO of HP and an ex-dean of the Georgia Tech College of Computing. The book paints a bleak picture for the future of most colleges and universities unless they are able to take advantage of some of the forces shaping higher education. Chapter 20 contains ten specific recommendations on what to do (but not HOW to do it): forget who is above you, focus on what differentiates you, establish your own brand, don't romanticize your weaknesses, be open, balance faculty-centrism and student-centrism, use technology, cut costs in half, focus on your own measures of success, and adopt the new Wisconsin idea (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wisconsin_Idea). While we may disagree on some of the proposed recommendations, I encourage you to engage in my most recent blog discussion about this most important topic.

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A PDF version of this communiqué is available at: <http://provost.unm.edu/communique/index.html>. Your feedback and input are welcome at: provost@unm.edu or at the electronic town hall: <http://connectu.unm.edu/>. Please also see the Provost's Blog at <http://provost.unm.edu/communique/index.html>.